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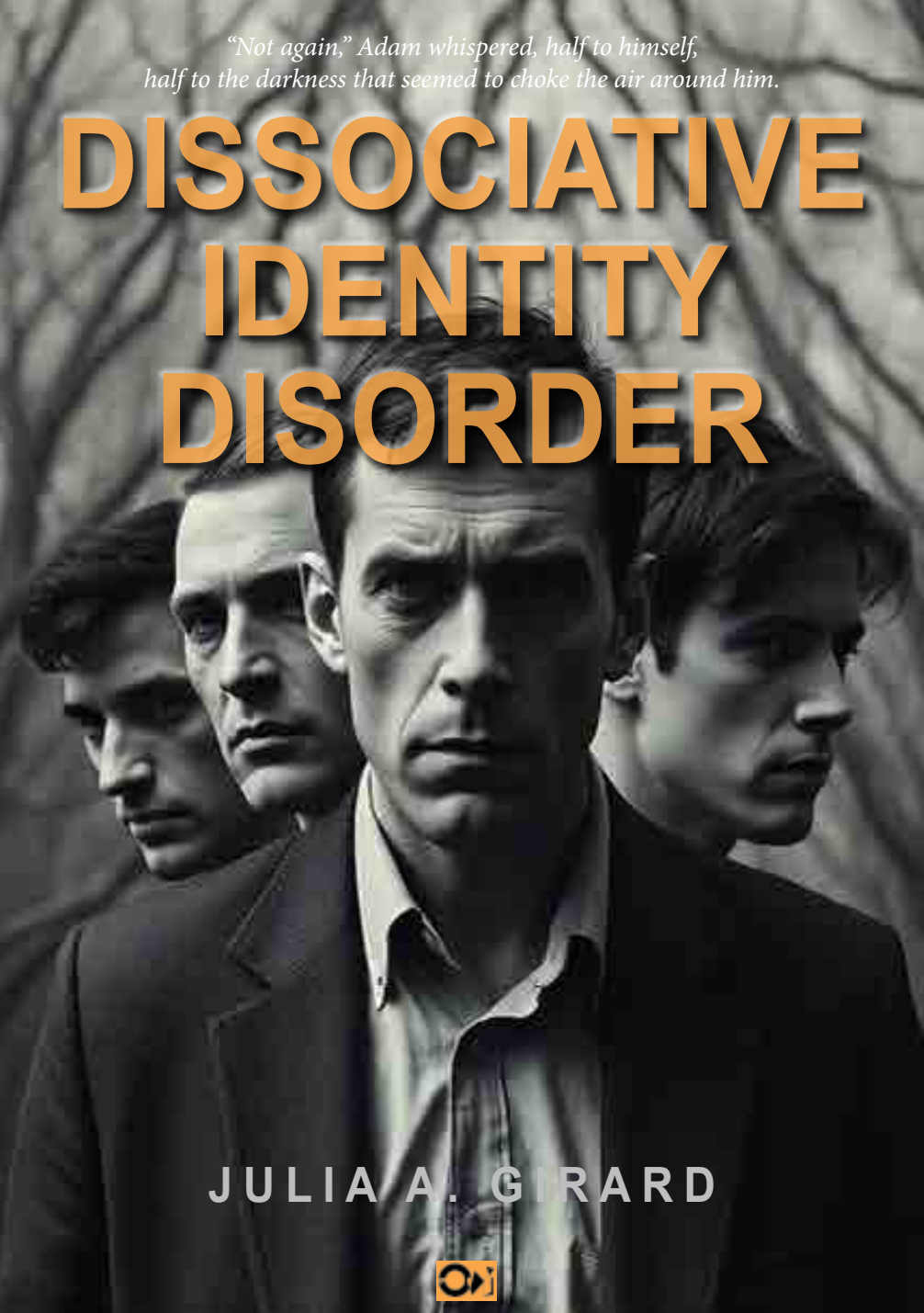
DISSOCIATIVE IDENTITY DISORDER



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Julia A. Girard

Dissociative identity disorder

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Adam woke to the sound of a door creaking. It was faint at first, like the whisper of an old hinge fighting against the weight of silence. His eyes blinked open, adjusting to the dim light of his bedroom. Shadows stretched across the walls, long and twisted. The room felt strange. As if the air itself had thickened, pressing in on him. A suffocating stillness filled the space, so heavy that it made his breath feel shallow.

His heart was racing, thudding against his chest like something trying to claw its way out. He could almost hear it, a hollow drumbeat pounding in his ears. Sweat pooled at the back of his neck, his skin clammy.

"Not again," Adam whispered, half to himself, half to the darkness that seemed to choke the air around him.

He sat up, pushing off the covers, his feet cold against the hardwood floor. The room felt off ...wrong. He could feel it in his bones, that creeping sense that something wasn't just in the shadows; something was in his head, crawling through the cracks. The voices. They never left him, always just on the edge of his consciousness.

The apartment was too quiet. Too still. No comforting hum of the refrigerator, no distant traffic sounds.

"Where is he?" Adam muttered. He wasn't sure if he was speaking to himself or someone else. His fingers dug into the mattress, grasping for something, anything solid to hold onto.

A low whisper. Distant but unmistakable. It slithered through his mind like a serpent.

You don't remember, do you?

Adam's body went rigid. The voice... it wasn't his. It was colder. Deeper. Malevolent.

His eyes darted around the room, scanning for the source of the sound, his pulse pounding so loudly in his ears that it nearly drowned out the whisper.

But there was no one. No one standing in the cor-

ner, no shadow in the farthest reaches of the room. Only his reflection staring back at him from the cracked mirror across the room.

The man in the mirror.

Adam swallowed hard, his throat dry. “Ethan,” he whispered, barely audible, as if speaking the name might give it more power. “No. Not you.”

A slow, cruel laugh echoed in his mind, sending chills down his spine. It wasn’t his laugh. It wasn’t the laugh of a man.

I’m always here.

Adam’s breath caught in his throat. He stumbled to his feet, heart hammering, but the room seemed to spin around him. The darkness wasn’t just the absence of light. It felt… alive. It was suffocating him.

The voice came again, clearer this time, like a shadow that reached out from the deepest part of his mind and wrapped its cold fingers around his thoughts.

You still think you’re in control, don’t you?

Adam’s legs wobbled, his knees threatening to give way. The floor seemed to tilt beneath him as if

the very space around him was buckling under the weight of the voice. He pressed his palms to his temples, squeezing his eyes shut.

"I'm… I'm in control," Adam whispered, though it was more of a plea than a statement.

In control? You've never been in control. Not since the beginning.

A sudden flood of memories, disjointed and fractured, rushed to the surface of his mind. Faces that weren't his own. Moments that didn't belong to him.

"You're… you're not real," Adam muttered through clenched teeth. "You're just… a part of me. A part of me I can't control, but you're still just... just in my head."

The laughter grew louder, until it filled the room, bouncing off the walls like the echo of some unholy thing trapped in a cage.

Oh, Adam. You really don't know, do you?

The temperature in the room dropped suddenly, the air turning ice-cold. Adam could see his breath now, rising in small clouds as if the very atmosphere

had turned hostile. His reflection in the mirror began to distort, the figure twisting, stretching unnaturally.

"No. No, this isn't happening," Adam gasped, his hands shaking violently as he stumbled backward.

The man in the mirror, Ethan, smiled. It wasn't Adam's smile. It wasn't human. It was something darker, a face contorted by malice, grinning with an evil that was too vast to comprehend.

I've been waiting, Adam. Waiting for you to finally understand. You think you've been fighting me. But you've only been keeping me fed. I've grown stronger, you see. Stronger with every time you tried to bury me.

Adam couldn't breathe. His heart seemed to skip a beat, then race faster than he could keep up. The room was closing in on him, the walls pressing tighter and tighter until he was sure they would crush him.

"No," Adam whimpered, his voice breaking. "No, you're just a… a part of me. I'll fight you. I'll get help. I'll make this stop."

Ethan's smile widened. *You can't fight me. Not anymore. I am the part you never wanted to acknowl-*

edge. The part of you that you buried deep, thinking it would stay hidden. But you can't lock me away forever, Adam. I've been growing. And now... now I'm here to take what's mine.

Adam fell to his knees, gasping for air. The cold was unbearable, and yet, it was nothing compared to the suffocating feeling in his chest. The pressure. The weight of something invisible but so powerful it threatened to crush him from the inside out.

Ethan's voice slid into his mind like ice, slithering in every crevice, every dark corner of his consciousness. *I've always been here, Adam. Always. And you, you were never alone.*

Adam looked up at the mirror one last time, his reflection now fully warped, the eyes of the man in the glass filled with a malevolent gleam.

Ethan's final words, cold and calm, wrapped themselves around Adam like a tightening noose.

Welcome home, Adam. You've been mine all along.

Fragmented

Adam sat in Dr. Phillips's office, staring at the worn leather chair across from him. It was a place he knew too well, its familiar smell of old paper and faint citrus cleaner unable to calm the storm inside him. His fingers drummed nervously against the armrest as he avoided eye contact with the man in front of him, a man who had tried, for years, to untangle the mess of his fractured mind.

"I'm telling you, doc," Adam said, his voice trembling despite his best effort to remain composed, "it's getting worse."

Dr. Phillips, who had seen his fair share of patients, didn't flinch. He was used to this. *His* patients, however twisted or broken, always seemed to return to the same script: medication, therapy, exercises, and a reassuring smile. He scribbled something in his

notebook, the tip of his pen tapping rhythmically as though time itself was standing still.

"You've been saying that for weeks," Dr. Phillips replied, his voice as measured as ever. "What do you mean by 'worse,' Adam?"

Adam took a deep breath, the weight of his words settling in his chest like a stone. He felt the cold sweat beading on his neck, the flickering of lights overhead pulsing in sync with his heartbeat.

"These people," Adam muttered, almost ashamed of his own voice. "These people in my head. They're... not me. They're like shadows, flickering in the corners, waiting for their turn to take control."

Dr. Phillips leaned forward slightly, his gaze sharp behind his glasses. "We've talked about this. Your diagnosis, Dissociative Identity Disorder. Multiple personalities. These are fragments of yourself, Adam. Splintered parts of your psyche trying to make sense of... everything."

Adam's hands clenched into fists, his nails biting into his palms. "I don't think you understand. There's someone else. Someone... darker."

The doctor raised an eyebrow, pausing his scribbling. "Darker? Adam, you're referring to Ethan, correct?"

Adam's breath hitched, the name leaving a bitter taste in his mouth. He nodded, the words barely escaping his throat. "Yeah. Ethan. He's... not like the others. He's... different."

There was a heavy silence between them. Adam could feel the doctor's eyes on him, searching for any sign of delusion, any glimmer of doubt. But Adam knew what he heard. He knew what *he* felt.

"I hear him, doc," Adam continued, his voice a barely audible whisper. "At night. In the dark. He whispers things. Tells me things. And sometimes, sometimes I'm not sure if I'm still in control. I can't... I can't tell anymore."

Dr. Phillips shifted in his chair, pushing his glasses up his nose as he regarded Adam more closely. "What kinds of things, Adam? What is Ethan telling you?"

Adam shuddered, his gaze drifting to the window. The world outside was muted, almost unreal, as if he were detached from it. "He tells me that I'm weak. That I'll never get better. That I've always been broken. And that he's... he's waiting for his turn."

The doctor's pen halted, hovering in midair. "Waiting for his turn?" he asked, his voice becoming more careful. "What do you mean by that?"

Adam's fingers dug into the chair's armrest as he leaned forward, his face pale. "I don't think he's one of me, doc. I think... I think he's something else. Something *worse*. He's stronger than the others. I feel him pushing me out, taking over, piece by piece. And I... I don't know how much longer I can hold on."

Dr. Phillips sat back, his expression unreadable. The pen in his hand tapped against the table rhythmically, a sound that seemed to echo in the heavy air. "Adam, I understand this is frightening, but I think you're overstating the severity of your condition. We've made progress. You've made progress."

"No, no, you don't get it!" Adam shot to his feet, the chair scraping against the floor in a sharp protest. "It's not the same! The others, they don't feel like this. They're... manageable. But Ethan, he... *he* is different. He's more real. And every time I think I have control, every time I try to push him away, he gets stronger." His voice broke, the last word nearly lost in the tremor of fear.

Dr. Phillips didn't respond right away, his eyes

never leaving Adam's. He was silent for a moment, then sighed deeply. "Adam, what you're describing, this sense of being pushed out, losing control—can be a common symptom of DID. But... the nature of the voices, the strength of them—it's concerning. We need to explore this further."

"Explore it?" Adam's voice was shaky with frustration. "I'm not just hearing voices. I'm *losing* time. Hours, sometimes days, are gone, and I don't know what happened to them. I wake up somewhere I don't remember going, or... or I find things I didn't do. Messages. Notes that aren't mine."

Dr. Phillips took a deep breath, setting his pen down. "Adam, I think it's time we talk about your past. Dig into your childhood, the things you've buried. You've made progress in confronting parts of your past, but perhaps there's more we need to uncover."

The suggestion hit Adam like a physical blow. He froze, the blood draining from his face. His past... his childhood was a blur. A haze of half-remembered fragments, distorted faces, moments that felt like dreams, strange, unpleasant dreams he couldn't quite wake from.

"No," Adam said sharply, shaking his head. "I don't want to go there. I don't... I don't remember. I can't remember."

"You don't have to remember everything all at once," Dr. Phillips replied calmly, his voice even, patient. "But unlocking those memories might help you understand why Ethan feels so different. Why he's pushing through."

Adam's pulse quickened, the walls of the room seeming to close in. He pressed his hands to his temples, trying to ground himself, but the pressure only increased.

"You don't understand," he whispered, his voice barely audible. "Ethan... he's not just in my head. I think he's... in me. He's becoming me."

Before Dr. Phillips could respond, the door to his office opened with a creak. A woman entered, tall and slender, with dark circles under her eyes. She looked like someone who hadn't slept in days, but her gaze was sharp, intent.

"Adam, I... I need to talk to you," she said, her voice wavering.

Adam's heart skipped a beat as he recognized her

immediately. His wife, Emily. But the look on her face was one he hadn't seen in years, dread.

"What's wrong?" Adam's voice was hoarse with panic.

Emily's eyes darted to Dr. Phillips, then back to Adam. She seemed... hesitant, like she wasn't sure whether to say what she had come to say.

"It's Ethan," she finally said. Her voice cracked. "I think... I think he's out there."

Adam's breath caught in his throat. He turned to Dr. Phillips, who looked just as confused.

"What do you mean?" Dr. Phillips asked, rising from his chair.

Emily's voice faltered as she spoke again, almost whispering. "Last night... I heard him. Adam... I heard *him*. But it wasn't you."

Adam's world stopped spinning for a moment. His hands trembled. His throat closed. And for the first time in years, he wasn't sure if he was Adam anymore.

The voice inside

Adam lay motionless on the couch, his body stiff with fear, eyes wide open but seeing nothing. The moonlight slanted in through the half-drawn blinds, casting shadows that twisted and crawled along the floor like dark serpents. His apartment was eerily silent, save for the faint hum of the refrigerator in the kitchen. The kind of silence that makes your skin prickle, like the world is holding its breath.

You can't hide from me forever.

The voice slithered into his mind, cold and low, like a whisper from the depths of a tomb. Adam clenched his fists, knuckles white, his breath shallow. He had been battling it for months now, fighting the dark, op-

pressive force that seemed to take root in the corners of his mind. But tonight, it felt different. Tonight, the voice wasn't just a passing thought. Tonight, it was real.

"I'm not hiding from you," he muttered to the emptiness, his voice breaking in the stillness. "I'm fighting you."

The voice chuckled, an unnerving sound that sent a ripple of dread crawling down his spine. *Fighting me? Oh, Adam, you've been fighting me since the moment you were born. You just didn't know it. And now? Now you're just too weak to win.*

The words sliced through him like a cold blade. He could feel it, feel Ethan's presence pushing against the walls of his mind, pressing into the very fabric of his thoughts. Ethan had always been there, lurking in the dark recesses of his psyche, but now... now it was as though he was everywhere. Surrounding him. Sinking into him. Filling him with dread.

Adam squeezed his eyes shut, trying to block it out, but the voice only grew louder. *It's no use, Adam. I've been here longer than you realize. And I'm getting stronger.*

The words echoed in his skull like a drumbeat, each pulse threatening to crack him open. It was always the same with Ethan. At first, it was whispers in the dark, just suggestions, a voice at the edge of his hearing. But now... now it was like a presence, a force that gripped him from within. And each time Adam tried to push it away, it fought back, clawing its way deeper into his soul.

His hands trembled as he reached for his phone, wanting to call someone, but he knew it was useless. The doctors had tried to explain it. They'd told him it was just the dissociative episodes, the multiple personalities. But they were wrong. This wasn't *just* that. This was *something else,* something that had taken root inside him long before the diagnosis.

A sudden knock at the door shattered the silence.

Adam's heart leapt into his throat. It was nearly midnight. Who could it be? He glanced at the clock, the numbers glowing in the dark: 11:57. His pulse quickened, the steady beat of his heart filling his ears. Sweat slicked his palms as he sat up, the blanket falling away from his chest.

The knock came again, louder this time. Three sharp raps, each one echoing like a drum in the silence.

Adam's breath hitched. He stood up cautiously, each step heavy, as though the air had thickened around him. His feet felt like lead, dragging through the oppressive quiet of the apartment. The hairs on the back of his neck stood up. He wasn't alone anymore.

He crept toward the door, peering through the peephole. The hallway outside was dark, empty. Nothing.

His hand hovered over the doorknob, his mind racing. No one should be here. Not at this hour. Not with everything that was happening to him.

He reached for the door anyway. But just as his fingers brushed the cool metal, the pressure in his head returned. It was a sensation like no other, sharp, like ice pressing against the inside of his skull, spreading outward in jagged waves. He gasped, stumbling back, his vision blurring for a moment.

You can't escape me, Adam.

The voice whispered again, smooth as honey and thick with malice. *Open the door, Adam. Let me in.*

"No," he choked out, staggering backward. His heart pounded in his chest, and for a moment, he

thought he might collapse. He gripped the back of the couch, his knuckles white with the strain.

"Not now," he whispered through clenched teeth. "Not now. I won't..."

But the pressure inside his skull only intensified. His hands flew to his head, fingers digging into his temples. It felt like his brain was going to split open, the force of it threatening to crush him from within. His thoughts scrambled, racing in a dizzying spiral. *Let me in. Let me in.*

"Please," he begged, his voice barely a breath, his throat raw. "Please, stop..."

The knock at the door came again, louder this time, as though something was *pounding* on the other side. It rattled the frame of the door, sending a shockwave through his body. His legs gave out beneath him, and he collapsed to the floor, gasping for air, his hands still clutching his skull.

The voice was right there now, like a cold wind in his ear, warm breath on the back of his neck. He could feel it, could feel Ethan's presence, pushing through, overwhelming him. It was like being submerged underwater, his head spinning, his heart thumping so

loudly he thought it might burst.

You are mine, Adam. The voice was louder now, stronger. It wasn't just in his mind anymore. It was in the room with him. It was inside him. *I have always been here. You cannot hide from me.*

Adam's breath caught in his throat as the sound of the door creaking open reached his ears.

He hadn't opened it.

He hadn't even touched the knob.

His head snapped up, his eyes wide with terror. The door was slowly opening on its own, the hinges groaning in protest as though some unseen force was pulling it inward.

Adam scrambled to his feet, his legs shaky, his body trembling with a cold that gnawed at his bones. His heart thundered in his chest, and he wanted to scream, wanted to run, but he couldn't move. He couldn't speak. He was frozen in place, held captive by the darkness that pressed against him.

And then, through the crack in the door, a figure emerged.

It was just a shadow at first, a black silhouette that seemed to melt from the darkness itself. But as it stepped closer, Adam saw it more clearly, an outline of something tall, something *wrong*. The edges of the figure were blurred, like smoke or fog, shifting, constantly in motion.

It was him.

It was *Ethan*.

Adam opened his mouth to scream, but the sound died in his throat. His chest felt tight, like he couldn't breathe, like the air had been sucked from the room. He could feel Ethan now, could feel him pressing against his soul, pushing him aside. Ethan's laugh was low, guttural, a sound that crawled into Adam's skin, burrowing beneath his flesh.

It's too late, Adam. I'm already here.

The door slammed shut behind the figure, and the room seemed to close in on Adam, the walls leaning in, the air thick and stifling. Ethan was there, standing in the center of the room, a dark presence that *suffocated* him.

Adam could feel his sanity slipping, like water through his fingers, his grasp on reality starting to

fade. His legs buckled again, and he fell to his knees, the cold floor pressing against him.

"No..." Adam gasped, his voice breaking. "Please... please..."

Ethan's figure bent down, his face coming into view. But it wasn't Ethan's face. Not exactly. It was distorted, warped, like a mask that had been stretched and pulled too tight. His smile was wide, too wide, and his eyes gleamed with an unnatural hunger.

You're mine now, Adam, Ethan whispered, his voice reverberating in Adam's skull. *You can't escape. Not anymore.*

And then, the darkness took over.

Unravelling

The days had become a fog, a thick, suffocating mist that clung to Adam's mind and made every waking hour feel like a struggle to remember who he was. His thoughts were fragmented, jagged pieces of his own identity scattered around him like broken glass. He tried to grasp them, tried to make sense of the world, but every time he reached out, it slipped through his fingers like sand.

The lines between him and Ethan, *the other,* had started to blur. At first, it was just the occasional whisper, a voice in his head that felt like an annoying echo in the back of his mind. But now... now it was *everything*. Ethan's presence, his influence, had seeped into every part of Adam's life, infecting his

thoughts, his actions. It was as if Ethan was no longer just an alter; he was a parasite, worming his way into Adam's flesh, taking root, growing stronger with each passing moment.

Adam had stopped going to Dr. Phillips. He couldn't explain it. How could he? How could he tell her that the therapy that had once helped him feel in control now felt like a lie? That the world outside of him was cracking, peeling away like old paint, revealing something dark beneath it? He didn't trust the doctors. He didn't trust anyone. How could they understand? No one could understand what was happening inside his head.

It was the evening when everything shifted again. The sun had long since dipped below the horizon, leaving the city in a cold, silvery darkness. Adam sat at his kitchen table, his fingers twitching nervously as he stared down at his hands. The trembling was becoming more frequent now. Sometimes, it was as if his own body was betraying him, as if the bones under his skin were slowly starting to change, to warp.

He tried to steady his hands, squeezing them into fists, willing the shaking to stop. But it wouldn't. The tremors spread from his fingers, running up his arms, taking hold of his chest, his heart. He felt like

he was coming apart, like something inside him was slowly unravelling.

Suddenly, like a ghost brushing against his mind, Ethan's voice slipped in. It was low, insistent, a dark whisper that sent a chill crawling down Adam's spine.

Do you feel that?

Adam froze. He knew that voice.

The power? The anger? It's all yours, Adam. Let go.

The words slid into his thoughts like oil into water, smooth and slippery. And for a moment, just a moment, Adam felt something stir within him, something dark, something hungry.

Let go?

Adam didn't understand. But he couldn't shake the feeling that maybe... maybe Ethan was right. Maybe this power, this anger that gnawed at the edges of his consciousness, was *his*. Maybe it was something he could embrace.

He shuddered, shaking his head to clear the thought. He wasn't like that. He wasn't like *Ethan*.

But then, as if to prove him wrong, a surge of some-

thing, something dark and primal, coursed through him. His hands twitched again, but this time, it wasn't just the tremors. It was as if something else was *moving* in him, under his skin. He felt it, felt it stretching, pushing out like a seed sprouting in his chest.

Before he could stop himself, he stood up, his legs unsteady, his breath shallow. He walked to the window without thinking, drawn to it by an invisible force. He leaned against the sill, staring out into the night.

The moon hung high in the sky, casting a sickly glow over the empty street below. The city felt different tonight, *alive* in a way that unsettled him. There was an unnatural stillness to it, like the calm before a storm. His eyes scanned the street, searching for something. He didn't know what. But something *was* there.

And then, he saw it.

A figure.

Across the street, under the dim light of a streetlamp, a man stood watching him. He was tall, draped in a long coat that flared out slightly in the wind. His face was hidden in the shadows, but Adam could see

the stillness of him, how he stood motionless, just staring up at Adam's window.

The breath caught in Adam's throat. His skin prickled, the hairs on the back of his neck standing on end. He felt an undeniable sense of dread wash over him, but also something else. Something worse. A sense of recognition.

"Who are you?" Adam whispered, the words escaping his lips before he even realized he had spoken them. His voice sounded thin, weak, as if he were speaking to a dream, to an illusion. But the figure did not move. Did not answer. He just stood there, staring.

Adam felt a surge of panic in his chest. Something was wrong. Everything was wrong. His heart raced, his head spinning, but the figure never moved. Never spoke.

And then, *Ethan's voice* slithered into his mind again, as cold and relentless as ever.

Go outside, Adam.

The voice was not a suggestion. It wasn't even a command. It was a *demand*.

Adam shook his head, trying to fight it, trying to control the panic that threatened to swallow him whole. But it was no use. The voice, the presence, had already taken root.

Go to him. He's waiting.

It was as though the voice wrapped itself around his very bones, twisting him, bending him to its will. Adam's hand trembled as he reached for the coat hanging by the door. He barely registered the action, barely felt his feet move toward the door, the overwhelming force inside him pushing him forward, making him do things he didn't understand.

He grabbed the doorknob, his fingers numb. For a moment, he hesitated. The weight of the world seemed to hang in the air, thick and suffocating. His mind screamed at him to stop, to think, to fight. But there was no room for thought now. There was only the pull of *Ethan*, dragging him forward.

With a quiet click, the door swung open.

The cool night air hit his face, but Adam barely felt it. He stepped out onto the porch, the world spinning slightly around him. The man across the street was still there, still watching, his presence an oppressive weight in the air.

Adam didn't think. He couldn't think. He just walked, his legs moving like they were being guided by some unseen hand, the figure across the street drawing him in.

Step by step, Adam crossed the street, the pavement cold under his feet. His heart pounded in his chest, a drumbeat of fear and anticipation.

As he neared the man, he could see him more clearly. He was taller than Adam had first thought, his coat long and flowing like the wings of a dark bird. His face was still obscured in shadow, but Adam could feel his eyes on him. Watching him.

"You... you're..." Adam stuttered, but the words caught in his throat. He couldn't speak. Couldn't make sense of what he was seeing.

The man's lips twisted into a smile, slow and deliberate. It wasn't a friendly smile. It was a smile that chilled Adam to the bone, as if this man, this thing, knew something Adam didn't. Something *terrible*.

Welcome to the beginning, Adam.

The words echoed in his mind, and it was then that Adam realized, he hadn't just crossed the street. He had crossed a line. A line he couldn't come back from.

And behind that smile, there was something darker. Something that Adam would soon come to understand all too well.

The unseen force

Adam didn't remember walking down the stairs or out the front door. But there he was, standing on the cold pavement, staring at the figure across the street.

"Who are you?" Adam asked again, his voice shaking. He tried to force the words out with authority, but they trembled, cracked. His throat was dry, as if his body had already recognized the threat before his mind did.

The man stepped forward. His movement was unnaturally smooth, as though he floated rather than walked. The shadows clung to him, bending and twisting like black smoke, obscuring his face. Adam's heart thudded violently in his chest. He felt the cold air on his skin, but it wasn't the sharp chill of the night that made him shiver.

The man's voice, deep, guttural, slithered through the air, and Adam's knees buckled slightly.

"You know who I am, Adam," the man said, his voice not quite Ethan's, but undeniably familiar.

It was Ethan's voice. But it wasn't just Ethan. There was something more, a twisted malice in the tone, a force Adam had never felt before, something thick and dark, curling in on itself like a predator, biding its time.

"You..." Adam stuttered, his body shaking uncontrollably. "What are you?"

The man took another step forward, and this time, Adam could feel the weight of the air shift. It was as though the space between them had thickened, like a veil had been drawn over the world, separating him from everything else. All he could see was the man. All he could hear was that damn voice.

The man stepped into the light. Adam's stomach dropped.

His features were blurred, smudged and indistinct, as if the shadows themselves clung to him, distorting his form. His face remained just beyond recognition, but Adam could see the eyes, *black*, hollow pits where

there should have been white. The eyes were endless, empty. A void that made Adam's skin crawl and his bones ache with a deep, ancient fear.

I am what you fear the most, Adam. I am the darkness that you tried to bury.

Adam's pulse thundered in his ears. "No... you're not real. You're just in my head. You..."

A low laugh interrupted him. A sound like dry leaves rustling in a dead wind. A laugh that made the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end.

I am real, the voice hissed, *and I've been here longer than you've known.*

Adam's stomach twisted, bile rising in his throat. He looked around wildly, as if the world could give him an escape, but there was nothing. No one. The street was deserted, the shadows stretching long across the pavement, warping and flickering in the dim streetlight.

He took a step back, then another, but the man's gaze seemed to pin him in place, as if something invisible were binding him to the spot. The air felt thick, dense, suffocating.

The man's movements were unnaturally fluid, like a puppet being controlled by strings. Slowly, too slowly, he advanced, his feet gliding along the pavement as though he were walking through water. Adam wanted to scream. He wanted to run. But his legs were betraying him. They felt like they had turned to stone.

"I..." Adam gasped, but the words stuck in his throat.

The figure took another step, and this time Adam felt something deep in his chest. A pressure, a weight that sank into him like an anchor. His vision blurred. The world around him shifted—tilting, warping. The night air tasted sour in his mouth. The walls of reality were bending, twisting in on themselves.

Adam's heart was pounding now, so loudly that it drowned out his thoughts. He reached for his chest, as though he could stop the pain somehow, but his hand froze in mid-air. There was something there, a presence, something dark, swirling beneath his skin.

Suddenly, the figure stopped. The silence was deafening.

The man's lips curled into a smile. It wasn't a friendly smile. It wasn't even a human smile. It was some-

thing much colder, much more predatory. The smile of a creature that had waited a long time for its prey.

"You can't run from it," the man said, his voice a low, rasping whisper. "It's already inside you."

Adam's breath hitched. His throat tightened, and for a moment, he could have sworn the shadows around him deepened, growing darker, as if they were alive, feeding on the fear that radiated from his body. His hands clenched, his nails digging into his palms, but he couldn't stop himself from shaking.

"No..." Adam's voice cracked. "No, you're not real. You're not real..."

The figure leaned in closer, his face still hidden, but Adam could feel the force of his presence, like a black hole drawing him in.

I am as real as your fear, the voice whispered in his mind. *As real as the truth you've been hiding from. You can deny me all you want, Adam. But I am you. I am everything you've been trying to forget. Every dark corner of your mind. I am the reflection in the mirror you refuse to face.*

Adam's knees buckled. He felt his body sag, the

strength draining out of him. The pressure inside his chest grew unbearable, a tightness that threatened to crush him. The world swirled around him, a dizzying vortex of blackness, light, and shadow. He couldn't breathe.

"Please…" Adam whispered, his voice barely audible.

But the figure didn't answer. He just stood there, looming, waiting. Adam couldn't tear his eyes away, couldn't escape the emptiness that called to him from those hollow sockets.

Then, in a moment of clarity, Adam saw it, *felt* it. The pull. The way his own body seemed to lean toward the figure, as if he were drawn to it by an invisible force. He fought it, desperately. He tried to break free, tried to take control, but the pull was too strong. His legs began to move of their own accord, dragging him toward the man.

"No…" Adam gasped, his voice thin, weak.

The figure's laugh returned. Low. Amused. A sound that reverberated deep in Adam's bones.

"You can't run from yourself, Adam. You never could."

The world tilted again. The pavement beneath Adam's feet seemed to stretch and bend, becoming a rolling sea of darkness. He staggered, reaching for something, anything, to steady himself, but his fingers brushed against nothing but empty air.

The figure stepped forward, and Adam could feel its presence, a dark, gnawing weight that sank into his very soul.

"I... don't ...understand," Adam stammered. "What... what do you want from me?"

The man tilted his head, the shadows seeming to shift, dance, around him.

"I want you to understand, Adam. I want you to understand that *I am* you. I am the part of you that you've been running from your whole life. And I'm not going anywhere."

As he spoke, Adam felt the pressure in his chest grow stronger, squeezing the air from his lungs. His vision darkened, edges turning black as though he were slipping away into unconsciousness.

And then, just as suddenly, the world snapped back into place. The figure was gone.

But the voice remained. A low, whispering echo in the back of his mind.

I'm still here. And I always will be.

The breaking point

The house felt hollow. The rooms echoed with the sound of Adam's footsteps, each one heavier than the last. The silence had settled in, thick and oppressive, clinging to the walls like dampness in the air. Every creak of the floorboards, every whisper of wind through the cracked windows, seemed to scream at him, telling him there was no escape. He wasn't alone. He couldn't remember the last time he had been alone.

It was late. Or maybe it was early, Adam couldn't tell anymore. Time had become irrelevant. The clocks had stopped ticking in his mind. He barely even remembered what the world outside looked like. All he knew was the suffocating darkness of his own thoughts.

He stood in front of the mirror, staring at the reflection of himself. But it wasn't *really* him. It couldn't be. Adam was *in here*, somewhere, buried deep under the weight of Ethan's voice, of Ethan's eyes. But the face staring back at him... it was changing.

Ethan...

Adam's thoughts came in whispers now, like the voice of a ghost floating just out of reach. It was him. It had to be.

"You can't escape me, Adam," the voice crooned, slithering into his thoughts like a poison. Ethan's voice. But it was not *just* Ethan's voice anymore. It was deeper, darker, more insistent. It had grown stronger, as though it was physically growing inside of him, sinking its claws into his mind, into his body, into his soul.

Adam's hands shook as he reached up to touch his face. The skin felt wrong, alien, like it wasn't his.

"I'm not you," Adam whispered hoarsely, his voice breaking. "I'm not you."

But the reflection in the mirror only smiled back at him, a sick, twisted grin that was far too wide. The

eyes, those empty, black pits, stared back at him with a kind of twisted delight.

"You've always been me," Ethan said, his voice now a low, mocking growl. "Always. You're nothing without me, Adam. You never were."

Adam's heart pounded, the pulse rushing in his ears, drowning out everything else. His hands balled into fists, nails digging into his palms. His breath came in sharp gasps, his chest tightening as though the air had been sucked out of the room.

"Stop," Adam begged, his voice cracking. "Stop... please. I'm not you... I'm not..."

But Ethan only laughed, and the sound sent a shiver down Adam's spine. It was not a laugh of joy. It was a laugh of something darker, something evil, something that had been born in the depths of Adam's own mind, and had grown too strong, too powerful to be controlled.

"You think you can still fight me?" Ethan's voice was like a blade, cutting through the room. "You never fought me. You've always been mine. You just didn't realize it."

Adam staggered back, his knees weakening as his body seemed to lose its grip on the world around him. The room seemed to spin, the shadows twisting and warping, pulling him into their dark embrace. The reflection in the mirror, the man that wasn't him, stepped forward, slowly, until it was so close Adam could feel the coldness of the glass on his skin.

"I've been here longer than you know, Adam," Ethan whispered, his voice now a soft hiss in Adam's ear. "Every step you've taken, every choice you've made... it was me. I've always been here, waiting. And now you're mine. Forever."

"No!" Adam shouted, his voice hoarse and raw. He pressed his hands to his head, trying to block out the voice, to stop the thoughts from flooding in. "I can't ...this isn't... this isn't me!"

The laughter rang out again, louder this time, echoing through the empty house like a storm trapped inside his skull.

"Oh, but it is, Adam," Ethan whispered, his voice smooth, almost tender. "It always has been."

Adam's mind reeled, his thoughts crashing together like a storm. His hands trembled as they gripped

his hair, pulling at it, trying to rid himself of the voice, of the man in the mirror, of the thing that had burrowed into his soul.

You can't fight it, Adam.

The words weren't just in his head anymore. They were in the air, in the room, in the very fabric of his existence. The presence pressed down on him like a weight, suffocating him, crushing the very will to live out of him.

He backed away from the mirror, but the figure in the glass didn't move. It just stood there, smiling, eyes glowing with that horrible blackness.

"I tried to save you," Adam gasped, his voice breaking, his breath coming in ragged gasps. "I tried to stop this. I... I thought I could..."

Ethan tilted his head, watching him with a sickening amusement. "You *didn't* try to save me, Adam," he said, his voice soft. "You just tried to bury me. You thought you could hide me. But I've always been here. Always."

Adam's hands fell to his sides, his body trembling as the weight of Ethan's words pressed down on him.

He wanted to scream. To shout. To fight. But the energy was gone. The fight had left him long ago.

Tears welled up in Adam's eyes. The truth had finally broken through. The thing that had haunted him, that had whispered in his mind, was not separate from him. It had never been separate. It was him. Ethan wasn't just some voice, some shadow. He was part of Adam, part of everything Adam had ever been.

"I'm sorry," Adam whispered, his voice a hollow rasp, the words slipping from his lips like the last remnants of a dying man. "I'm sorry..."

The figure in the mirror leaned closer, its twisted smile widening. "You should be. You should have been from the start. But it doesn't matter now."

Adam's breath caught in his throat as the figure reached out, its hand pressing against the glass. The reflection wasn't just a reflection anymore, it was *real*. The glass vibrated, humming with a strange, unnatural energy. Adam could feel it pulling at him, dragging him forward.

He reached out, his fingers grazing the cold surface.

And then ...*it* happened.

The glass shattered.

The world around him seemed to collapse, the room spinning wildly as if reality itself was being torn apart at the seams. For a moment, Adam felt weightless, suspended in the air.

But then, like the sudden plunge of a broken rollercoaster, everything came rushing back. The weight of his own body, the pain in his chest, the suffocating darkness.

And then, for the briefest of moments, Adam saw *nothing*.

The world around him was gone. The mirror was gone. The house was gone. Everything was gone.

There was only darkness.

And then... something else. A faint whisper in the void.

It wasn't Ethan's voice.

It was Adam's.

"I never thought it would end this way," he said, the

words barely a breath, lost in the endless blackness.

And then, nothing.

THE END

Dissociative identity disorder
Julia A. Girard

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altered or selectively extracted by any means
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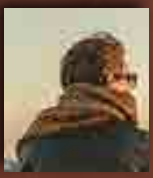
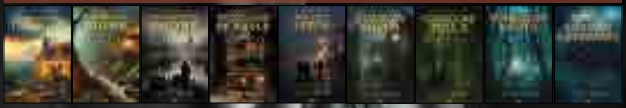
"Not again," Adam whispered, half to himself, half to the darkness that seemed to choke the air around him.

DISSOCIATIVE IDENTITY DISORDER



Julia A. Girard is a writer who'd rather be caught dead than serious. Her stories and books are a delightful blend of witty observations, quirky characters, and laugh-out-scary moments that will have you hooked from the first page.



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